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THE
IMPORTANCE OF CHARITY,
A
SERMON
PREACHED IN THE CHURCH
OF
FALKIRK,
SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 4th. 1800.
FOR
THE BENEFIT
OF THE
PUBLIC KITCHEN
IN THAT TOWN,
BY
JAMES WILSON, M. A.
MINISTER OF FALKIRK.

THE PROFITS ARISING FROM THE SALE TO BE
GIVEN TO THE SAME CHARITY.

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1800.

IMPRINT OF CHARITY

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE BURIAL

OF A LADY

OF THE TOWN OF BATH



PUBLISHED BY

JOHN JOHNSON

ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD

1794

Price 1s. 6d.

By the Author

JOHN JOHNSON

ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD

1794

TO
Those at whose request
This
SERMON is published,

IT
Is MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY
THE AUTHOR.

FALKIRK, JUNE 11th, 1800.

These are whole copies
This
Stanton is published



is most interesting

THE AUTHOR.

Printed by J. G. Smith, 11, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.

THE
IMPORTANCE
OF
CHARITY.

JOB xxix. 11, 12.

When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor, that cried, and the fatherless, and him, that had none to help him.

WHATEVER is written in the volume of nature, or the book of grace, is written for our instruction. In all the appointments of heaven the wise and contemplative mind may read lessons of value and importance. *Day unto day uttereth speech,*

*speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge, * prosperity and adversity speak a language, which cannot easily be mistaken. Can we view, without emotions of awe, the arrangements of providence, by which our daily bread is so excessive in price; and by which the poor of the people mourn. We hear in them a voice from heaven, saying, Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited. †* As the afflictions of an individual are fitted to correct error, and lead to obedience: so those of a nation are intended to check iniquity, and promote goodness. Read the catalogue of national sins; and while you are considering to whom any of them belongs, let each for himself put the important question, which the disciples of Jesus did of old, saying, *Lord is it I. ‡* Have not pride and luxury, corruption and licentiousness, irreligion and discontentment been prevailing among us? Surely it is meet to be said unto God, *we have borne chastisement, we will not offend any more; that which we see not teach thou us. ** May the need, which we have of the divine compassion, induce us to show mercy to others: and may the sorrows, which encompass

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* Psal. xix. 2. † Jer. vi. 8. ‡ Mat. xxvi. 22. * Job xxxiv. 31, 32.

ourselves, lead us to sympathize, with those who
mourn.

HAVING assembled here with a benevolent design, permit me, by the blessing of the Almighty, to present a few motives for exciting you to the cordial exercise of charity; and then to conclude with some additional observations.

I. You are invited to the practice of charity by the amiableness of its nature, and the high degree of respectability, which it stamps upon your conduct. Charity hath powers, which press irresistibly upon the feeling mind, and render engaging the conduct of the generous man. As order and harmony infuse delight, without waiting for the slowness of investigation; so generous feelings, and generous actions captivate the mind, and charm the soul:

CHARITY is not only engaging by its amiable form; but also on account of the honourable sentiments, which it implies. He, who is unjust, exposes himself to the severity of punishment, and the man, who is treacherous sinks into contempt, and is in danger of the judgment; but though it is
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dishonourable to be void of feeling, and destitute of compassion: yet the mean and selfish man is not ranked in the same class with those, who violate the laws of society, and the precepts of morality. Therefore bountiful emotions are not the offspring of fear: they are not regulated by human laws, but are the genuine effusions of a tender heart.

OSTENTATION may sometimes mingle its dregs with the cup of compassion; but the habitual exercise of charity cannot dwell, where true benevolence doth not reside. It is not in the system of avarice to feed the hungry, nor to clothe the naked; he who doth these things, hath a witness in himself: and his deeds are *life to his soul, and grace to his neck.* * When Job appeared at the gate, or prepared his seat in the street; the young men hid themselves; and the aged, who have always been honoured, and who were particularly so in the patriarchal ages of the east, rose up before him. Princes laid their hands upon their mouths in token of respect, and *the nobles held their peace.* † *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me, said Job, and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor, that cried,*
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* Prov. iii 22. † Job xxix. 10.

and the fatherless, and him, that had none to help him.

THESE are not our highest inducements to charitable conduct, they occupy but a subordinate place in the scale of virtuous motives: but a regard to the esteem of men is a necessary part of a good character. To seek the praise of men, and not the praise of God, is hypocritical and base; but if we regard not man, much reason is there to suspect, that the fear of God dwelleth not in us. Shame and a sense of honour are never lost but among the wrecks of virtue, and a good conscience.

BENEVOLENCE likewise recommends itself to your attention, because the exercise thereof softens and improves the heart. Sympathy and the gentle graces of compassion are fruits of heavenly origin; they require for their growth the attentions of virtue, together with the mild influence of order and peace; and they on their part cherish whatsoever things are excellent and worthy of praise. The gentle and better feelings of the heart lead to piety, and kindle within us the flame of pure and animated devotion. When the cords of sympathy

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vibrate, and exert their native powers: they harmonize the whole affections, and produce candour, pity, and friendship. The prevalence of those virtues precludes rashness of censure, contention and strife. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind, beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* * It diffuses tranquility through the soul, and peace among the various orders of men: whereas the opposite temper fills the breast with inquietude, and scatters *fire brands, arrows and death.* † The man, whose spirit is full of rancour and strife, is neither capable of happiness here, nor prepared for the possession of glory hereafter. That mind, which is racked with envy, embittered with malice, or distracted with rage, is destitute of quietness on earth, and is not adorned with the graces of peace and benevolence, which are presages of rest in heaven.

CHARITY can never be without its proper objects, for though the Lord *watereth the hills from his chambers, and the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his works* ‡ yet *the poor shall never cease out of the land, therefore I command thee, saith the Almighty, that thou open thine hand wide unto thy*
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* 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 7. † Prov. xxvi. 18. ‡ Psal. cvi. 13.

*brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land. **
 Extensive is the range of suffering, and various are the sorrows, which the children of men endure: fell is the edge of poverty, and hard is that man's fate, who is fed on the bread of charity: but to you it belongs, ye sons of fortune, effectually to bring them relief: and it is every man's duty to pour balm into the wound of sorrow. The contemplation of affliction, as it affects a multitude, excites your pity; but it does not so completely rouse your compassion, and penetrate the heart, as when you select an individual, and consider his case alone. What is borne by many operates upon the mind, in the first moments of its feeling, as if the weight were divided; and of course less grievous to every one taken by himself; although the sufferings of many rather increase those of an individual, the number of such as can relieve being diminished, and the afflictions of a neighbour aggravate the bitterness of wo. But, to divest yourselves of every false impression, enter into the cottage of the poor; mark the man of years and indigence, and see the pressure of age added to a load of infirmities, which poverty has produced.

But the helplessness of youth is still more distressing than the helplessness of old age: the man of

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* Dent. xv. 11.

years has already drawn near the end of his course; and only a small portion of his life remains: whereas the youth is but entering upon the field of the world, and has the whole appointments of his lot to encounter. Therefore with respect to the rising generation, *Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days* * Let the happy fruits of charity excite you to the exercise of benevolent deeds. The streams of benevolence run with a pleasing current; and when they overflow their banks, they leave behind them such nourishing substances, as spread health, and vigour upon the adjoining borders.

SCANTY as the streams of charity are, they have in every age been productive of happy fruits, and never did they swell with such bountiful supplies, as they do at present. Whatever may be the vices of the age, in which we live; and that they are great, as well as numerous, we have reason to lament; yet generosity and the tender feelings of the mind adorn the present generation. Noble are the inducements to humane exertions: charity gives relief from pain, it abates the keenness of anxiety, it

* Eccl. xi. 1.

it proclaims liberty to the captive, and it confers upon those, who mourn, *beauty for ashes, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.**

BUT you ought to look beyond more immediate effects, and dart your eye into the region of days to come, where still greater and more valuable consequences will appear. When you cast your *bread upon the waters*, it is chiefly *after many days*, that you are to look for the blessing. If you rescue the young from misery, you give them life instead of death; you confer upon them health, and strength instead of sickness and debility. By putting them under the guidance of true religion, you administer to them the means of spiritual salvation; and you train up a generation, which may be useful and happy.

THE charitable object, which you are now invited to consider, is calculated to give effectual relief to the poor; and it cannot easily be misapplied by those, on whom it is bestowed. Moreover it is well adapted for preventing that strolling mode of soliciting aid, which has long been ruinous to the poor of Scotland. Let a person begin this unhappy

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career without any notorious habits of vice; yet he is in eminent hazard from the example and influence of the profligate, who abound in those paths. The young mind, in particular, is easily infected with vice; and a man of feeling can never find a youth in such destructive roads, without being disposed to drop tears of compassion. He sees, in those of this description, talents, which might have raised the possessor to honour, in the direct train of hurrying him into shame and ruin: he finds that activity, which might have been useful in the world, employed in sinful and pernicious pursuits: he detects that sensibility, which might have adorned devotion, encouraging the baser feelings of a corrupted heart.

WHILE reverses of fortune teach us our duty, poverty continuing in a dark and unaided state bewilders the understanding, and debases the mind. The eye of such a mind sees no beauty in the creation, no excellence in providence, no wisdom on high. The world is to it a gloomy and forlorn desert, where sorrow and wretchedness have taken up their abode. Whatever is admired by others is neglected by the destitute and forsaken man; but when he is raised by the hand of charity, fed with
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the bread of compassion; and comforted by the kindness of attention, he is restored to his proper condition, the fields and every thing about him rejoice, and are in unison with his enlivened heart. The love of God and the love of man occupy a large share of his affections; he sees, and acknowledges the wisdom of providence, and his notes of gratitude rise to heaven. Such are the effects, which charity is calculated to produce; but if days or relief should arrive, without bringing on their beams the incense of gratitude and virtue, be not discouraged; for your labour is not in vain. The dew and the rain moisten the deserts, which remain unproductive, as well as the fields, which yield abundance of increase: but the dew and the rain are useful, even when their effects appear to be lost.

Be it also remembered, that he who *batb pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord.* * It is your father's good pleasure, that you give and communicate. The supreme disposer of events employs agents in accomplishing the purposes of his will. The lightning, the storm, and the tempest obey his command; the sun, the moon, and the stars fulfil his pleasure; the whole of nature is subservient to his decrees:
and

* Prov. xix. 17.

and therefore the children of men are also ministering agents under his direction. Every part of inanimate nature lends its aid, and communicates its influence to promote the benefit of the whole creation: and surely it becomes you in your station to assist those, who are brought low. To the human race is assigned the office of bearing one another's burthens, and soothing one another's sorrows. Of what you possess give a portion to those, who have none to help them, that you may not only honour your heavenly father, who requires you to have pity, but also become workers together with him in doing good to his creatures.

If those, who solicit your aid, be victims of indiscretion, they are recommended to your charity, by fewer claims than those of a different complexion: but still they are your brethren, children of the same father in heaven, objects of his parental care, subject to similar temptations, and men of like passions as yourselves. Have you more effectually *escaped the corruption, that is in the world?* rejoice in those gracious and religious appointments of heaven, by which you became *partakers of the divine nature** and pity those, who have been

* 2 Pct. i. 4.

been betrayed by corruption, and in the hour of danger, have yielded to temptation. While the feeble hand withers, which is stretched out for charity, stand not you still to investigate the cause, from which the wretchedness flowed; abhor guilt, but pluck the sinner as *a firebrand out of the burning*, * and never let charity fail. Endeavour to give it that direction, which will relieve the needy, and reclaim the abandoned.

THE cry of worth and of poverty will find ready access to your ear, and you will have a peculiar pleasure in doing good to those, whom the Lord delighteth to honour. From you they solicit the kindness of a brother now; and at length *the lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* †

LET the situation of the needy move you to compassion, for you know not what a day may bring forth. Many are now eating the bread of affliction, and drinking the waters of poverty, who were once as wealthy, as any of you is independent.

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* Amos iv. 11. † Rev. vii. 17.

Though your riches and your honours may have descended to you, through a long line of ancestors, the rust and accidents of time may find access, and destroy them. But, in general, the possessions of men are less secure, and in danger of being consumed, *as a garment that is moth-eaten,* therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.†* Though Job was the greatest of all the men of the east, yet in one day, the enemies of his peace and the fire of God from heaven ‡ stripped him of his substance: the wind of the desert, *smote the four corners* of the banqueting house, where his sons had met, and they escaped not from its ruins.* To all this was soon added such bodily affliction, as made him choose *strangling and death rather than life.†* If you have caused the eyes of the widow to fail by fruitless expectation, if you have eaten your morsel alone ‡ when the fatherless fainted by the way; or if you have seen another perish by cold, while you were comfortable and warm, what will you do if God rise up, and bring you into calamity. Be ye merciful, as your father in heaven is merciful, who *maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good,*

* Job xiii. 28. † Math. vii. 12. ‡ Job i. 16. * Job i. 19.

† Job vii. 15. ‡ Job xxxi. 16, 17.

*good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust.** Instead of making the hail and the floods, as messengers of his judgments, *sweep away the refuge of lies†*, he looked upon us in the day of our transgression, and he said unto us live. When the dark cloud of sin, which rose upon the garden of Eden, had spread itself abroad over the nations, even in the fulness of time, God sent his son to be *a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.†* When mankind were held fast in the fetters of iniquity, the Lord *visited and redeemed his people,** When guilt hung over them in awful forms, and threatened destruction from the presence of the Lord, he *set forth his son to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins, that are past, through the forbearance of God.†* There *mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace embraced each other.†* Longings after immortality being founded on nature, and encouraged by analogy, have sprung up, and existed in every age and nation; but thick darkness hung over the grave, and even the wisest of men looked toward it with anxiety and fear. In this state of the world Jesus

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brought

* Matth. v. 45. † Isa. xxviii. 17. † Luke ii. 32.

* Luke i. 68. † Rom. iii. 25. † Psal. lxxxv. 10.

brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel. Here was manifested the love of God towards us, because he sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us; he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him†. But whosoever hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ‡*

THE benevolence of Jesus is also recorded for an example to you. *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might inherit.* Though in him the fulness of the godhead† dwelt, and though he was in the form of God, yet he took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.† He went about doing good ‡ to the bodies, and to the souls of men. If a mother was in bitterness for an only child: if sisters wept for*

* 2 Tim. i. 10. † 1 John iv. 9, 11, 12, 16: ‡ 1 John iii. 17.

* 2 Cor. viii. 9. † Col. ii. 9. ‡ Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8. * Acts x. 38.

for a beloved brother, or if a master was in sorrow for a faithful servant, he was equally ready to enter into their feelings, and grant them relief. He gave benevolence, as a distinguishing criterion, by which at the final judgment, the righteous shall be separated from the wicked as well, as that by which, they should prove themselves, in this world, to be his disciples. So dear is charity in his sight, that he views every deed of benevolence, as a token of kindness to himself, *in as much, as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* * He delivered the best instructions to the world; and when his followers were sorrowing in the prospect of his departure, he cheered them, with the promise of a comforter here, and of glory hereafter. Even amid the agonies of death, he pitied his enemies, and said, *father, forgive them.* † Grow, therefore, *in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ,* ‡ who, *that he might sanctify the people, suffered without the gate* *

II. UPON a review of what hath been said, it appears, that charity is *the end of the commandment;* † and

* Matth. xxv. 40. † Luke xxiii. 34. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 18.

* Heb. xiii. 12. † 1 Tim. i. 5.

and now I am to conclude with a few observations upon the manner, in which it is to be given, and received.

YOUR mercy must proceed from proper motives, or else, it cannot ascend with acceptance to heaven. The charity of the ostentatious man may be pleasing in the season of need, as the return of rain in the time of drought; but it flows not from those virtuous and tender emotions, which dignify, and improve the mind. Therefore, said our Lord, *when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.* * Some exertions of charity neither can, nor ought to be kept secret; because their object is public, and they encourage others to go, *and do likewise:* † But excepting in such circumstances as those, the delicacy of true benevolence shuns observation and seeks the shade.

CHARITY shall cover the multitude of sins. ‡ Amidst its mild and charming radiance, many failings may pass without much observation; or rather as the wise man saith, *love covereth all sins,* * that is, the man of kindness and humanity uniformly feels himself-

* Matth. vi. 3. † Luke x. 37. ‡ 1 Peter iv. 8.

* Prov. x. 12.

self disposed to conceal the infirmities and faults of others. Benevolence is pleasing and important: but the offerings of iniquity are not acceptable to God; wash therefore your *hands in innocency* *, and then compass the altar of charity. Within its sacred precincts let nothing, which is unhallowed enter, for impure hands and a deceitful heart are abomination to the Lord. What pretensions can he have to humanity, who blasts the character of the innocent, or destroys the peace of the unsuspecting? How can he be deemed charitable, who weeps over the afflictions of a stranger, but sees, without compunction, the heavings of that sorrow, which his falsehood planted in the breast of the simple? Never shall I call any man charitable, who doth not add, to the gifts of liberality, the possession of a chaste and sober mind: for without these, though he were to bestow all his goods upon the poor, and even give his *body to be burned* †, yet the image and supercription of iniquity would remain upon him.

OPEN the hand of liberality with discretion, and neither let your charitable deeds interfere with that, which

* Psal. xxvi. 6. † 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

which you owe to another, nor injure those of your own house, for whom you are bound to provide. That conduct, which is truly honourable, and to which you ought to aspire, comprehends the whole duties of life, and all the graces of the spirit. It unites the whole commandments of the moral law ; and adds to these the ornaments of compassion.

SELECT proper objects for your charity, and this you will be enabled more effectually to do, by giving your aid chiefly to those, whose circumstances and situation you have an opportunity of knowing. If you act otherwise, you are in danger of encouraging idleness and vice: for the profligate and vile will not fail to assume the garb of poverty, and assail you with the voice of complaint.

BUT while you guard against the cunning of the impostor, revere virtue, though in humble life; and remember, that nothing is more dignified, than a man of worth bearing misfortunes; and nobly struggling in the grasp of poverty. Be not too minute in marking the failings of the poor man, for if stern justice were to bring us into judgment, who could

could stand? Through the tattered garments of poverty, defects and failings are easily seen; while the purple and fine linen; the superb and costly robe veil imperfections, and dazzle the piercing eye of severity. Indigence gradually blunts some of the more delicate sensibilities of the soul, and leads into temptation. But beware lest avarice, under the pretence of curbing vice, harden your heart, and teach you to be cruel. *Pure religion and undefiled, before God and the father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep unspotted from the world.* *

AND now my poorer brethren, whose cause I have been pleading this evening, suffer you also *the word of exhortation*. † Let gratitude dwell in you richly, and bless those who do you good. Avoid murmuring at the providence of God, and suppress envy toward your superiours; suffer not that destructive passion to nestle in your bosom, for the fruits thereof are bitterness, malice and death. Hard is your fate here; but whom the Lord loves he chastens, and your prospects hereafter are as bright, as those of the most prosperous sons of fortune.

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* James i. 27. † Heb. xiii. 22.

MOREOVER those, whom you are in danger of envying, are less happy than you are apt to suppose; they who increase riches, increase sorrow; and those on stations of eminence have wringings of the heart, with which a stranger cannot intermeddle. Go round the circle of society, view the towers, the palace and the cottage: and lo! this will you find, that the sum of human happiness is more equally divided, than the pangs of poverty had led you to conceive. The vast extent of the universe requires numerous gradations of objects and situations; but in wisdom, and in mercy hath God appointed them all.

BE industrious, be frugal in your station, *lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, and where your treasure is, there will your chief affections be also. May he, who provideth food for the ravens, visit you in the day of trouble; and the Lord your righteous prayers all fulfil. And *now unto him, that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen. † 8 MAR 65*

* Matth. vi. 20. † Jude 24, 25.

By the same author, a Defence of public,

or social worship in a letter addressed

TO

GILBERT WAKEFIELD. B. A.

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